

Reflexive antiracism: A novel approach to diversity training

Ethnicities

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Abstract

This article introduces the concept of reflexive antiracism as a response to two major critiques of antiracism theory and praxis: the dangers of essentialism and the elicitation of counter-productive emotional reactions. The article explores these critiques as they apply to two broad approaches to diversity training: cultural awareness and antiracism. Reflexive antiracism offers an alternative to existing approaches through a focus on racialisation and the formation and maintenance of racialised identities in particular. An emphasis on the paradoxes of racialisation and the contingencies of minority and white antiracist identities can promote a realistic and productive understanding of diversity training that may avoid the pitfalls of existing approaches. To conclude, an outline of factors that contribute to reflexive antiracism praxis are presented, drawing on examples from an existing diversity training course.

Keywords

Antiracism, critique, cultural awareness, diversity training, emotion, identity, indigenous, race, racialisation, reflexive, white

Introduction: Racism, antiracism and diversity training

Those who identify as progressive or antiracist would agree that racism exists in all societies, and should be actively addressed. A key concern of antiracists is the

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denial that racism exists, which, apart from its disregard for those experiencing racism, is an obstacle to achieving fairness and equity (Bhavnani et al., 2005; Kivel, 1995). In fact, the denial of racism is almost as ubiquitous as racism itself (International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2000). Moreover, those who are most likely to perpetrate racism are the least likely to recognise such action as racist (Sommers and Norton, 2006). Even when a specific instance of racism is recognised as such, it is usually considered 'out of character' rather than reflecting any enduring racist tendencies (Rebollo-Gil and Moras, 2006). Thus, antiracist practice is understandably aimed towards recognising and preventing racism through 'unlearning' racist beliefs and replacing them with cultural tolerance, respect and appreciation (Dass-Brailsford, 2007).

However, efforts to reduce racism such as diversity training are not without their hazards. If such efforts fail, they run the risk of worsening racism rather than alleviating it. This article explores the two major critiques of diversity training – essentialism and the elicitation of negative emotions – and proposes the alternative approach of reflexive antiracism. This approach addresses critiques of diversity training by drawing on insights from critical race theory, social psychology, whiteness studies and literature on intersectionality, and through incorporating the concepts of constructivism, racialisation and identity formation. We provide examples of this approach from a diversity training course that two of the authors present.¹

Diversity training is one among a range of corrective interventions aimed at reducing racism on individual, institutional and societal levels (Paradies et al., 2009). Although a focus on individuals to the exclusion of institutions and societies is unlikely to reduce racism, this article will focus on diversity training (defined as training that aims to increase awareness of racial, ethnic and cultural differences and build skills to promote diversity and reduce racism) precisely because it is the most common approach to antiracist practice today.² In this article, we draw on the diversity training literature predominantly derived from the United States (US), complemented with insights from critical race theory and social psychology. To this US-dominated literature, we add examples and evaluations of diversity training from the Australian context, where the minority group of interest is usually Indigenous Australians.³

We also draw on scholarship that seeks to understand how white people gain unearned privileges in Western societies, and thus how whiteness is a central element in the oppression of minority groups (Kivel, 1995; McIntosh, 1990; Tatum, 1997). Within whiteness studies scholarship, white is not considered a 'natural' category based on skin colour. Rather, it is the structure through which white cultural dominance is naturalised and, thus, reproduced and maintained (Frankenberg, 1993). The category of 'white antiracists', therefore, is not limited just to those who have white skin, but extends to the broader group of antiracists who identify with, and benefit from, the racialised societal structures that privilege those with white skin and/or other axes of advantage such as wealth and education.⁴

In addition to recognising the complexities of whiteness as it intersects with class as an axis of oppression/privilege, we build on intersectionality literature that has explored the 'dangers of categorization' and essentialism while respecting the 'messiness of subjectivity' (Nash, 2008: 4). We seek to address concerns that intersectionality scholarship can 'romanticize and idealize positions of social subordination' and has failed to study privileged identities (Nash, 2008: 8). We also respond to calls for intersectionality to examine privilege and oppression as co-constituted, by considering racism and anti-racism as intertwined aspects of racialisation and by studying white identities as simultaneously privileged and stigmatised in specific contexts (Kowal, 2011; Nash, 2008).

The dangers of essentialism and negative emotions are explored in this article as two major critiques of diversity training. Scholars have noted that motivated anti-racists (in social psychological terms, individuals who have an internal motivation to respond without prejudice) are prone to negative emotions such as discomfort, distress, guilt, fear, anxiety, anger, inaction and withdrawal (Nile and Straton, 2003; O'Brien, 2009; Spanierman and Heppner, 2004; Tatum, 1992). One important source of these emotions is the disjunction that may arise between internalised antiracist ideals and 'unconscious' feelings, thoughts and behaviours that reflect racist norms (Sommers and Norton, 2006). King has alternatively understood this as a contradiction between antiracist ideals and a consciousness that 'tacitly accepts dominant white norms and privileges' (referred to as 'dysconscious' racism) rather than an absence of consciousness per se (King, 1991: 135).

A certain level of negative emotions caused by such a disjunction can result in greater effort and success in achieving antiracist (or non-prejudiced) behaviour in the short term (Fehr and Sassenberg, 2010; Monteith et al., 2010). However, in the long term there is also potential for such emotion to create 'backlash' effects (Slocum, 2009; Smith and Redington, 2010) such as defensiveness, resistance (Ancis and Szymanski, 2001; Kernahan and Davis, 2007), reduced support for affirmative action or higher levels of racial prejudice (Case, 2007). In addition, such emotions can lead to dysfunctional 'rescuing' paternalism and a reluctance to employ confrontational skills when needed (Ridley, 1995). Such backlash effects are not uncommon. For example, up to a fifth of participants have increased levels of racial prejudice following diversity training (Paradies et al., 2009; Trenerry et al., 2010).

This article will engage with these empirical and theoretical critiques of antiracism and propose an alternative approach we call reflexive antiracism. Reflexive antiracism aims to address these critiques and foster antiracist practices that are both sustainable and effective by acknowledging the ambiguities of antiracist practice. After a consideration of the two main critiques of diversity training, we outline how reflexive antiracism addresses these through theoretical grounding in constructivism, racialisation and processes of identity formation. In the last section of this article, we discuss issues related to the practical application of reflexive antiracism, drawing on the training course for professionals working with Indigenous populations in Australia that two of us present.

Diversity training and its critiques

Governments and the private sector have increasingly implemented diversity training in many developed nations where there is concern about racism and its effects. Paluck (2006) notes that 66% of US employers used diversity training in 2006 even though federal equal opportunity law does not require it, and three-quarters of US employers plan to maintain or increase spending on diversity training (Novations Group, 2007). In Australia, a national research study of the effectiveness of cross-cultural training in the Australian public and community sectors found that over 60% of participants wanted more cross-cultural training (Bean, 2006).

A diverse range of activities fall under the heading of 'diversity training' (Abell et al., 1997). Following dominant ideas in the fields of education and behavioural change, there are three main areas of learning identified in diversity training literature: attitudes, knowledge and behaviours (Beach et al., 2005; Kulik and Roberson, 2008). Diversity training can form elements of workforce development initiatives or can be delivered in other institutional settings such as schools (Jakubowski, 2001) or prisons (Baba and Hebert, 2005). Composition can range from web-based programmes to brief lectures and workshops to field trips and excursions to cultural immersion activities. Many courses take place in one day, whilst others may be conducted across several weeks or months (Paluck, 2006).

Such variation in course content and mode presents difficulties when assessing the effectiveness of diversity training programmes and has most likely influenced the lack of studies that have assessed diversity training effectiveness. A tension also exists between designing an educational experience that will create change among participants and the need to develop cost-effective ways to train large numbers of employees. As a result, training programmes are often evaluated not by their effectiveness, but by the number of people who are trained (Anand and Winters, 2008).

The potential for discrepancy between intent and outcome of diversity training programmes is apparent in the results of existing empirical studies. Three review studies of over 32 diversity training programmes in varying contexts found that, while 50–60% of participants display less racial prejudice than they did before the training, or than those who did not participate in the training (where a control group is included), 15–20% of participants show an *increase* in racial prejudice as a result of diversity training (Paradies et al., 2009). Such results highlight the risks inherent in antiracist practice and the need to anticipate negative outcomes.

The following section will explore cultural awareness and antiracism as two major approaches to diversity training. There are two key critiques associated with these approaches. The first is that diversity training essentialises racial identities, whereby distinct groups are believed to have innate, immutable characteristics (negative, positive or somewhere in between) that are rooted in their race (Eichstedt, 2001: 447). As we will discuss, the risk that a training course may encourage participants to homogenise racial groups is not limited to racial minorities, but also extends to essentialising white racial identities. The second major

critique relates to affective reactions (primarily guilt and anxiety) that can result from diversity training and lead to backlash effects such as increased prejudice. We outline these critiques below before discussing reflexive antiracism as a novel approach to antiracism that seeks to avoid these limitations.

Cultural awareness training

Ignorance has long been blamed as the root of prejudice (Stephan and Stephan, 2001). Most people aspire to be fair, it is thought, but can engage unintentionally in racism through ignorance (Abell et al., 1997). Research shows that negative stereotypes and accompanying high levels of prejudice are often influenced by false beliefs that people hold about particular groups (Paradies, et al., 2009). Most organisational diversity training emphasises the provision of information about the relevant minority group (Wheeler, 1994). For example, the bulk of workplace diversity training in Australian government and community sector organisations incorporates knowledge-raising approaches (Bean, 2006). Diversity training relating to Indigenous Australians is particularly likely to involve awareness-raising approaches (Farrelly and Lumby, 2009). In a survey of professional diversity trainers in the late 1990s, 83% of respondents identified heightened awareness of cultural difference as their primary objective in designing and administering diversity training programmes (Mouton-Allen and Rockwell, 1999).

However, this approach has been subject to considerable criticism. It is argued that cultural awareness programmes contribute to heightened stereotyping and the entrenchment of racial identities in static immutable forms (Kowal and Downing, 2011; McGregor, 1993; Walcott, 1997: 122).⁵ Focusing on the characteristics of specific minority groups can reinforce essentialist racial identities in a number of ways. For instance, portraying cultural groups in a simplistic way can encourage a false 'mastery' of different cultures (Walcott, 1997: 122). Highlighting this risk, an Aboriginal scholar has voiced her concern that health workers who attend cultural awareness training feel a false sense of 'cultural knowledge', stating that trainees 'just go off for a two-day training course and have a piece of paper to say I know everything there is to know about Murri⁶ stuff now' (Fredericks, 2008: 86). Similarly, Gross (2000) notes that cultural awareness education directed at social workers may promote 'mastery' of minority cultures. Those who believe they have such mastery are in danger of understanding clients on a merely superficial level (Gross, 2000). Ultimately, service providers may fail to provide the highest level of care if they are encouraged to define clients on the basis of racial characteristics or identification.⁷

Not only are cultural groups in danger of being portrayed in simplistic ways but, in attempting to understand 'them' better, their 'otherness' is accentuated (Pettman, 1988). This approach can reinforce power imbalances by emphasising those who tolerate and those who are 'tolerated', granting power to those who choose to provide or withhold toleration (Colvin-Burque et al., 2007; Hage, 2003; Hollinsworth, 2006a). Critics have questioned whether this approach can effectively

address racism. Webb and Sergison (2003) argue, for instance, that the 'cookery book' or 'tick box' approach to training, in which a 'recipe' for successful interaction with 'other' cultures is presented and racist prejudices are not challenged, can reinforce negative beliefs and practices rather than improve them (see also Ahmed, 2012). Similarly, Sarup (1991) argues that 'just to learn about other people's cultures is not to learn about the racism of one's own'. These views are supported by Reimann and colleagues (2004), who found that knowledge of cultural factors and exposure to other cultural groups did not facilitate culturally competent care. It was instead found that such care was most strongly related to recognition that cultural factors and awareness of personal biases are important (Reimann et al., 2004).

Antiracism training

Programmes that reflect upon the sources and impacts of racism on society form an alternative to cultural awareness training. We refer to this approach as 'antiracism training'.⁸ Antiracism training encourages participants to examine their own experience of race, become aware of themselves as racial beings, and further develop their racial identity when acquiring knowledge about cross-cultural interactions (Gushue and Carter, 2000).

The notion of 'white privilege' is often addressed in antiracism training programmes. Whiteness studies, a multidisciplinary field that has developed over the past two decades, defines whiteness as a hegemonic, normative racial identity which secures its dominance by remaining invisible, and by 'seeming not to be anything in particular' (Dyer, 1997: 44). White people are afforded material and psychological advantages (Brodkin, 1999; McIntosh, 1990), which may include greater access to various resources, as well as the power and opportunity to define rules, norms and worldviews (Poteat and Spanierman, 2008). Racial minorities are differentiated from whiteness and considered to be lacking, inferior, deviant or abnormal (Frankenberg, 1993; Sue, 2006).

In response to the critiques raised by Whiteness studies, and because the majority of students in diversity training courses are often white, a major learning objective for antiracism programs is to assist white people to develop an awareness of their whiteness and its meaning in their daily lives (Miller and Harris, 2005). White people are encouraged by training facilitators to shift their thinking of racism from something that is individual, malicious, overt and possibly exaggerated by people of colour, to seeing it as a pervasive reality that they themselves have a responsibility to address (Miller and Harris, 2005). As Janet Helms (1990, 1995) argues, it is only when white persons fully examine their whiteness and recognise their position in the racial order that they can move beyond positions of assumed superiority.

Various authors have conceptualised models of progression through which whites evolve as they encounter whiteness pedagogy (for example Banks, 1995; Hardiman, 2001). The White Racial Identity (WRI) model proposed by Janet

Helms (1990) is arguably predominant. Helms established two overarching stages within which six dynamic cognitive, emotional and behavioural processes (termed 'ego statuses') exist. First, whites must abandon racism, and progress from (1) having limited awareness of racism (*contact*) through (2) feeling guilty and uncertain about their racial position (*disintegration*) to (3) placing the onus of racism on its victims (*reintegration*). Second, they may define a positive identity by (4) trying to 'help' people of colour become more like white people (*pseudoindependence*) and then (5) beginning to question white identities and search for a positive model of whiteness (*immersion*). A person with the most 'healthy' WRI is governed by the sixth and final ego status (*autonomy*). Autonomy is characterised by a pluralistic, flexible interpretation of racial stimuli and a definition of self as a racial being that does not depend on the perceived superiority of one racial group over another (Helms, 1996). As explored below, the autonomy stage of WRI has some similarity with our concept of reflexive antiracism. However, the structure of antiracism training programmes can hamper development of the autonomy ego status by essentialising white identities and inadequately managing negative emotions experienced by participants.

Whilst cultural awareness training has been criticised for essentialising *minority* identities, antiracism training risks reifying *white* racial identities as inherently racist and incapable of being antiracist; as ignorant of racial issues (Miller and Harris, 2005); and as generally deficient or even stigmatised (Kowal, 2011). This precludes recognition of white racial identity as multifaceted and continually 'in formation' (Winant, 1994). The equally suspect corollary is that non-white identities are portrayed as inherently injured, morally pure and, as critiqued recently by Warren and Sue (2011), automatically knowledgeable about race and racism. Emirbayer and Desmond (2012) call this set of beliefs the 'insider doctrine'.

A second set of critiques concern the management of negative emotions that can be associated with antiracism training, particularly discomfort, distress, guilt, fear, anxiety, anger, inaction and withdrawal (Nicoll, 2004; Nile and Straton, 2003; Novations Group, 2007; O'Brien, 2009; Spanierman and Heppner, 2004; Tatum, 1992). There are emotional consequences of the essentialism of white and minority identities and the associated 'we-them' perspective towards difference that Gosine (2002: 96) describes as simplistic and binary. An atmosphere of accusation and bias against white people can be created in diversity training courses (Von Bergen et al., 2002: 243). Related to this, when white people begin to acknowledge white privilege and the role that white people play in contributing to racism, they may no longer feel comfortable with their white racial identity (Helms, 1996; Lucal, 1996; Mio and Barker-Hackett, 2003), an effect heightened by perceived incommensurabilities between a white and an antiracist identity (Swim and Miller, 1999). They may become more aware of the disjunction between strong internalised antiracist ideals and 'unconscious' (or 'dysconscious') racist feelings, thoughts and behaviours (King, 1991; Sommers and Norton, 2006). This range of effects can result in both external and internal sources of negative emotions that can be challenging to manage constructively.

Psychologists use the terms ‘cognitive dissonance’ or ‘value discrepancy’ in reference to the sense of psychological discomfort people feel when their stereotypes and prejudices are shown to be inconsistent with their values or principles (Paradies et al., 2009; Tatum, 1992). Guilt and anxiety are two outcomes of cognitive dissonance, and how these feelings are managed have implications for the effectiveness of diversity training programmes. Several studies have demonstrated the correlation between guilt and the recognition that white people are granted unearned privileges in most, if not all, societies (Iyer et al., 2003; Swim and Miller, 1999). Various forms of guilt have been identified, including personal guilt (Spanierman and Heppner, 2004), guilt about the existence of racism (Swim and Miller, 1999) and collective guilt (Branscombe et al., 2007).

A number of studies have found that guilt can result in positive responses. Guilt can induce feelings of remorse and attempts at restitution to the injured party (Swim and Miller, 1999) while feelings of collective guilt (Halloran, 2007; McGarty et al., 2005; Powell et al., 2008) and moral outrage (Wakslak et al., 2007) have been associated with antiracism. Guilt in conjunction with feelings of empathy among white people has also been associated with a reduced propensity to deny, distort or minimise the existence of racism (Poteat and Spanierman, 2008). However, there is also a risk that students will recoil from feelings of guilt and consequently avoid interracial contact because of increased anxiety (Gaertner and Dovidio, 1986), deny their race completely or resist learning about race and racism after growing weary of being labelled an ‘oppressor’ (Miller and Harris, 2005). Students may also feel a sense of hopelessness or resignation (Chick et al., 2009). Alternatively, they may simply re-characterise their self-concept in terms of an identity that has less focus on antiracism and egalitarian values (Doosje et al., 1999; Slocum, 2009).

Jane Elliott’s *Blue Eyes* programme is an example of a training programme in which trainers invoke strong emotions in an attempt to create discomfort among participants. The programme creates situations in which participants experience discrimination themselves and feel its effects emotionally in order to show white people how it feels to be ‘oppressed’. Stewart and colleagues note that college students who participated in the programme reported anger with themselves when engaging in prejudiced thoughts or actions (Stewart et al., 2003). Although this can be helpful in the short term, if individuals cannot move beyond anger at themselves to empathy or moral outrage they are at risk of falling back into an even stronger identification with and defence of their privileged position, correlating with the *reintegration* stage of WRI (Stewart et al., 2003; Tatum, 1997).

Guilt about white privilege is closely linked to fear of committing further oppressive acts against non-whites. Fear of perpetuating racism gives rise to increased caution when interacting with individuals from minority cultures. This can manifest in a desire to be, or at least appear to be, ‘politically correct’ by avoiding all expressions or actions that could possibly be perceived to exclude, marginalise or insult people who are socially disadvantaged or discriminated against (Marques, 2009). While it is clearly important to take reasonable measures

to avoid offending people, when combined with significant anxiety, an atmosphere of walking 'on eggshells for fear of unwittingly transgressing the rules of political correctness' can be invoked (Ely et al., 2006: 80).

Social psychologists have observed this effect, with low-prejudiced whites paradoxically appearing to be prejudiced in inter-racial interactions because they 'choke' as a result of anxiety about what their minority interaction partner thinks of them (Vorauer and Turpie, 2004). It is for this reason that political correctness has been criticised as 'a double-edged sword' (Ely et al., 2006: 80). Such anxiety can also lead white antiracists to avoid subjects that they fear will lead others to blame or judge them (Ely et al., 2006). Abell and colleagues record that white antiracists expressed fear that other whites would attack them for saying something 'wrong'. By attacking another white person for being 'racist', white people attempt to publicly validate their 'antiracist' motives (Abell et al., 1997).

If well managed, guilt and anxiety produced in diversity training programmes can lead to antiracist outcomes, but they may also result in behaviour that detracts from the goals of such programmes. Participants from dominant social groups, who are generally the principal target group for diversity training programmes, are often challenged to manage negative feelings about their racial identities. These negative emotions coupled with stereotypical portrayals of racial identities can reinforce the power dynamics that contribute to racism as participants attempt to re-establish a 'good feeling' about themselves (see Ahmed, 2005; Steele, 1990). Rather than giving up on such participants and labelling them as inherently or irrevocably racist, we maintain that diversity training can be delivered in such a way as to minimise these responses.

Towards reflexive antiracism

In light of the above critiques we have sought to develop an approach to antiracism that seeks to avoid essentialism and provide tools to effectively manage reactions such as guilt and anxiety. The experience of two of the authors (EK and YP) in teaching, over a nine-year period, a diversity training course for white people working with Indigenous Australians informs this approach.⁹ Operating through the lens of reflexivity, this approach is premised on three theoretical foundations: constructionism, racialisation and processes of identity formation.

Reflexivity is both a theoretical tool and a research method in many academic disciplines. Used as 'a strategy for situating knowledges' (Rose, 1997: 306), it requires that the researcher reflect on their own background and 'cultural baggage', and their relation to research subjects (De Jong, 2009). Whilst the notion of reflexivity has been employed extensively in academia (e.g. Bourdieu, 2004; Etherington, 2004), it is gaining increasing recognition as a tool to critique cross-cultural practices within health care and social work (De Jong, 2009; Kondrat, 1999; Murray-Garcia et al., 2005). Reflexivity has been found to enhance learning in diversity training and lead to more flexible behaviours (Lillis and Hayes, 2007; Chick et al., 2009). In relation to prejudice, greater awareness of the process of one's own

thinking has been associated with minimising bias (Murray-Garcia et al., 2005). Reflexive individuals may be more willing to 'take risks, to view mistakes as part of the learning process and to grow and change' (Johnston, 2009: 649) and to engage 'with issues such as racism and colonialism' (Pon, 2009).

To be effective antiracists, particular aspects of reflexivity are required. Specifically, there is a need to avoid essentialising minorities as 'good' and essentialising white people as 'bad'. White people, in particular, need to recognise how they benefit from privilege without becoming mired in guilt and anxiety. Although they can and should try to be ever cognisant of their privilege, they need to accept that they cannot erase their whiteness.

A central component of reflexive antiracism is the concept of 'racialisation'. As Giroux (2006) and Murji and Solomos (2005) note, this concept has been used ambiguously. In particular, Goldberg (in Giroux, 2006) notes that the concept is often erroneously equated with 'racism' itself. Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 154) refer to racialisation as 'injecting racial elements into a situation or the process of creating a race' while Goldberg defines it as 'racialized discourse... [with] racism as (one of) its expressive objects' (Goldberg, 1993: 41). In a similar vein, we consider racism and antiracism as elements of the broader concept of racialisation embedded within asymmetrical power relations. Drawing from Paradies (2005: 3), racialisation is defined here as:

Societal systems through which people are divided into races, with power unevenly distributed (or produced) based on these racial classifications. Racialisation is embodied through attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, laws, norms, and practices that either reinforce or counteract power asymmetries.

Racialisation is used here in a descriptive sense rather than a critical one.¹⁰ Within a racialised societal system, actions can either enhance or reduce power asymmetries between two (or more) racial/ethnic groups. Racism and antiracism can be defined on this basis. For instance, antiracism can be defined as action that reduces power differentials. This usually occurs through advantaging subordinate racial groups and/or disadvantaging dominant racial groups (Paradies, 2005). Racism can be defined as the opposite (i.e. action leading to an increase in power differentials between two racialised groups). This usually occurs through advantaging dominant racial groups and/or disadvantaging subordinate racial groups.

Note that our definition does not dictate the categories of persons who may do things that result in racism or antiracism. As power differentials can occur in complex and cross-cutting patterns, members of both dominant groups (e.g. whites) and non-dominant groups are capable of perpetrating racism and/or pursuing antiracism (Sawrikar and Katz, 2010). While the extremes of racism and anti-racism are clear-cut, the line that divides them can be difficult to define and there are examples where it is arguable whether an act is racist or antiracist.¹¹ For instance,

the efforts of an antiracist from a dominant group to assist a member of a minority group can be perceived as paternalistic, and a means to enhance the privilege of the antiracist rather than reduce power differentials between the two groups (Jensen, 2006). A reflexive antiracism approach would recognise that, in an instance such as this, valid arguments can be made to support either view and a definitive judgment on whether power differentials are reducing or increasing may not be possible.

Reflexive antiracism allows antiracists to recognise that, within a racialised field, the division between racism and antiracism is often unclear and in flux. As white people working in a racialised field where members of minority groups routinely experience race oppression, they are perpetually susceptible to accusations of racism, either by other white antiracists or by members of minority groups. Consequently, they need to be secure enough in their identity to respond reflexively in such situations. Reflexive antiracism is therefore characterised by a reflexive stance towards one's own and others' attitudes, beliefs and behaviours while striving towards both equanimity in emotional reactions and a positive white identity. A reflexive antiracist approach encourages reflection on, and ultimately acceptance of, these tensions (Helms, 1994). This is similar to what O'Brien has termed 'reflexive race cognizance' (2001: 56) and to the inherent ambiguity and tensions between white privilege and antiracism recognised within 'White dialectics' (Todd and Abrams, 2011).

A clear danger in adopting reflexive antiracism is complacency. If one's white antiracist identity is secure enough to weather accusations of racism, then it may actually be resistant to recognising racism in one's own attitudes, beliefs or behaviours. Reflexive antiracism is an ongoing process of appraising antiracist practice and recognising the inherent tensions and paradoxes the politics of working within racialised fields (Kowal, 2008). White antiracists often worry about being racist. Reflexive antiracism provides them with the theoretical framework to understand that both racist and antiracist acts are *racialised*, and there will often be different opinions on whether a particular action or event is racist or antiracist. This approach attempts to counter the potential negative effects of guilt and anxiety as well as essentialised identities.

Reflexive antiracism has some elements in common with Helms's final *autonomy* stage of WRI. Like those Helms describes in the autonomy stage, reflexive antiracists are comfortable with their white racial identity while acknowledging that white people individually and collectively contribute to the oppression of minority groups. Those in the autonomy stage are flexible, 'no longer react out of rigid world views', and 'no longer feel a need to oppress, idealise or denigrate people [including white people] on the basis of group membership characteristics such as race' (Thompson and Carter, 1997: 25). In this sense, they are aware of the processes of racialisation and identity formation, and able to understand, and respond effectively to, these processes that arise in the course of their work and personal lives.¹²

Reflexive antiracism in practice

In this final section, we discuss reflexive antiracism in practice through an example that illustrates the pedagogical potential of racialisation and identity formation in diversity training courses. We then outline other structural and theoretical aspects of the diversity training course presented by two of the authors (EK and YP) that facilitate the development of reflexive antiracism.

In this example, participants are encouraged to be reflexive about the norms of antiracism, or, in Foucauldian terms, the knowledges associated with the subjectivity of those who identify as antiracist. While antiracism training programmes regularly discuss white privilege and its effects on non-white minorities (content which is also covered in our course), it is also useful to explore aspects of white antiracist identities that generally escape attention because they are considered morally positive. In this case, reflexivity about why antiracists consider certain attitudes to be 'politically incorrect' allows participants to better appreciate how the maintenance of their own identities (as antiracist whites) intersects with their perspectives on Indigenous disadvantage. Developing a reflexive understanding of the interplay between identity formation and antiracist practice is a key aim of reflexive antiracism.

In the session in question, participants are asked to think of all the reasons that Indigenous Australians suffer from particular health and social problems at higher rates than non-Indigenous Australians (each small group is assigned a particular health or social problem). Participants are specifically asked to include 'politically incorrect'¹³ reasons that they were unlikely to agree with personally, but that they had heard from others or the media. After brainstorming many different reasons for each of the four health problems, participants from each of the four groups are asked to come together to arrange their reasons into categories of their choosing. The outcomes of more recent course cohorts are similar to the result of the 2003 course that is detailed by Kowal and Paradies (2005). The exercise reveals a clear tendency towards structural attributions for Indigenous ill-health, including reasons grouped under *the health system*, *historical context*, *money/financial* and *remoteness* categories. Complementary to this, there is clear discomfort with explanations that stressed agency, demonstrated by the fact that nearly all the reasons that were identified as politically incorrect were within the category that participants described as *individual/behavioral*. Participants were more likely to blame the system, and were reluctant to nominate Indigenous people's choices or actions as even a partial cause of their ill-health (Kowal and Paradies, 2005).

It is clear that antiracists are uncomfortable in associating Indigenous agency with Indigenous social problems because of a fear of 'victim-blaming', an attribute associated with racism. In an attempt to avoid racism, motivated Australian antiracists are inclined to attribute Indigenous disadvantage to structural factors that are seen to constrain and limit choices, rather than to the actions of Indigenous people themselves. Since both structural and agential factors are deeply interrelated

and are both required to explain poor health and other axes of disadvantage, the exclusion of Indigenous agency from any explanations may have a significant impact on how social problems are viewed and which solutions are proposed (Kowal and Paradies, 2005). This effect, which we dubbed 'overstructuration' (Kowal and Paradies, 2005), has been recognised recently by others who note the tendency for race scholarship to minimise agency for people of colour and instead focus on racial structures (Emirbayer and Desmond, 2012). Antiracists are usually not aware that the maintenance of their own identities may influence the way they view Indigenous disadvantage. Reflexive antiracism can facilitate insight into the effects of racialised discourses and identities on the way that anti-racists understand disadvantage and construct potential solutions.

Aside from the content of the training course, a number of additional factors help to engender reflexive antiracism in a training context. It is useful to approach the training as a facilitated discussion, rather than a transmission of ideas from instructors to participants. This is first established in the course through the statement and circulation of 'ground rules':

There are no right or wrong ideas or expressions. Raise your hand for clarification (there is no such thing as a stupid question). Be respectful of, and listen to, what others have to say before responding. Critique ideas, don't criticise people.¹⁴ Emotional expressions and discussion of feelings are encouraged (framed as 'I' statements). Please contribute, as together you have more knowledge and expertise than we have as the presenters.

Facilitators reinforce this list of ground rules by asking follow-up questions of participants to help clarify their position or critique, ensuring that the group considers all comments, and framing their own views as opinions on equal footing with participants rather than suggesting that a view is 'wrong' or 'incorrect'. Participants are encouraged to comment on and respond to these ground rules before agreeing to respect them for the duration of the course.

The structure of each session encourages such discussion by providing stimulating material, using small group work to complete an analytical task and then concluding with facilitated discussion of the whole group. We have found that keeping the group to a maximum of 24–28 participants (four groups of six or seven) is also important to maintain the intimacy and trust required.

The racial identity of the presenters is also a factor in establishing a context that supports training effectiveness. Research conducted within the US government suggests that pairs of diversity trainers who differ in terms of race/ethnicity or gender produced significantly more learning among participants than homogeneous trainer pairs (Hayles, 1996), with more recent scholarship suggesting that race/ethnicity rather than gender is of particular importance in a diversity training context (Lieberman et al., 2011). In our case, one presenter identifies as an Aboriginal-Asian-Anglo-Australian man (YP) while the other identifies as a Jewish-Polish-Australian woman (EK). Not infrequently, the presenters

respectfully disagree with each other on a range of issues. This works against a form of unreflexive antiracism in which there is a desire to agree with any Indigenous person present, instead facilitating honest and open discussion.

A theoretical grounding in constructionist approaches is also important to reflexive antiracism. In the first session of the course, the concepts of discourse and construction are introduced to participants, drawing on Foucault and Latour (Foucault, 1983; Latour, 2003). Discourse is presented as ‘constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them’ (Weedon, 1987: 108). Constructivism is presented as one of a range of approaches to the relationship between ‘reality’ and ‘perception’, which range from positivism to radical deconstructivism to multinaturalism. This material is made accessible by working through examples of how knowledge, social practices and subjectivities about gender have been constructed over time (Laqueur, 1990). This is followed by an identity exercise wherein participants discuss their range of identities with a partner. A discussion follows about the categories of identity that are more or less common (place, professional identity, marital status, hobbies, ethnicity – particularly indigeneity and non-indigeneity – gender and age) as well as those that are usually absent, such as sexuality, religion and ableness. Combined with the theoretical grounding, this practical exercise illustrates how identities are contingent, dependent on both societal norms and specific context (such as a training course), change over the life course,¹⁵ and are not reducible to essentialised elements such as race. This provides an excellent grounding for the discussion of more challenging material such as white privilege and white racial identity later in the course.

Conclusion

Reflexivity has long been a concept of interest to the social sciences, and scholars are beginning to consider the importance of reflexivity when interrogating race. In a recent article on the importance of reflexivity for race scholarship, Emirbayer and Desmond argue that ‘our understanding of the racial order will forever remain unsatisfactory so long as we fail to turn our analytic gaze back upon ourselves, the analysts of racial domination, and inquire critically into the hidden presuppositions that shape our thought’ (2012: 574). The same could be said for antiracist praxis, which we believe will ‘forever remain unsatisfactory’ unless the critiques we have outlined are addressed.

We have offered here a detailed case for how reflexivity can address the pitfalls of diversity training and antiracism in general. The concept of reflexive antiracism introduced in this article has the potential to counter the detrimental effects of essentialism and negative emotional reactions through a focus on racialisation and reflexivity, particularly in relation to white antiracist identities. To develop reflexive antiracism, white people need to avoid essentialising minorities as ‘good’

and white people as 'bad'; need to recognise how they benefit from privilege without being overwhelmed with guilt and anxiety; need to accept the 'fact' of their whiteness; and need to recognise how their need to maintain an antiracist identity effects the way they conceptualise, and act to counter, racial oppression. We have outlined a range of theoretical, pedagogical and structural approaches to diversity training that constitute a reflexive antiracist praxis. Further research, both qualitative and quantitative, is required to determine the effectiveness of this approach in promoting antiracist action that better achieves racial equity and justice. However, we hope that our synthesis of existing critiques of antiracism and proposal for a concrete approach for addressing them reinvigorates scholarship on diversity training and antiracism.

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Notes

1. EK and YP. One of us identifies as a Jewish-Polish-Australian woman (EK) while the other identifies as an Aboriginal-Asian-Anglo-Australian man (YP).
2. This includes training programmes associated with various labels, including multicultural, cultural awareness, antiracism, cross-cultural, conflict resolution, equity, cultural competence and prejudice reduction, amongst others.
3. Indigenous Australians are descendants of pre-colonial populations of Australia. They are known as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and they numbered 517,000 at the 2006 Census (that equates to 2.5% of the population). Indigenous Australians are highly disadvantaged as a group. For example, the gap in life expectancy at birth between Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians is 11.5 years for males and 9.7 years for females (Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010).
4. While our discussion of 'whiteness' and 'white identities' includes non-white people who benefit from aspects of white privilege (through their educational or economic advantage; see, for example, Zhou, 2004), the effects of diversity training on people from non-white backgrounds will have specific features that are beyond the scope of this article. It is worth noting, however, that in an Australian context there is limited solidarity between Indigenous and non-white peoples and a concerted effort to divorce debates about 'multiculturalism' and immigration from Indigenous issues, in no small part because Indigenous leaders have consistently objected to being 'lumped' in with other non-white minorities and thus having their claims on the state reduced to cultural difference, obfuscating issues of sovereignty and dispossession.
5. This view is supported, for example, by the results of an Australian study, which found that that students were more likely to believe that Aboriginal people are all alike following an intervention that taught specific cultural information (Copeman, 1989).
6. This is a term for an Aboriginal person used in many parts of Queensland (a north-eastern state of Australia).

7. To illustrate the dangers of perceived cultural 'mastery', one nurse working with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory admitted to 'doing bad work' when attempting to conduct culturally appropriate practice (Kowal, 2007: 132):

'I was working in community health and this lady came in and I had been doing the pain unit [at University] and they told us that Aboriginal people might describe pain as a snake in their chest or something like that so this Aboriginal lady came in and said she had a sore arm. And I said, "Oh what's wrong with your arm?" And she said "I think it's got a piece of wood in it" so I was thinking, "oh, what would wood mean?" And I go on being really culturally appropriate and all this sort of stuff. Anyway so we put this bandage on it. And I got her to come back in two days time and I took the bandage off and it had sort of festered up a bit, so I was cleaning it out, and I went "God! There's a piece of wood in there!" And she went, "I told you it was stuck" and I thought "oh, god, I am so sorry". And so you can just miss the point, because you are trying too hard'.

8. Programmes that incorporate variations of this approach are sometimes referred to as Racism Awareness and/or Social Justice training (Hollinsworth, 2006b).
9. The course, 'Race, Culture, Indigeneity and the Politics of Disadvantage', has been taught at least annually since 2003.
10. Whether a 'post-racial' future that transcends racialisation is possible or desirable is an important question (Gilroy, 2000), but one that is beyond the scope of this article.
11. Bonnett (2000) and O'Brien (2009) make a related argument that antiracism cannot be considered as the direct opposite of racism, as one entity may practice antiracism in a manner that may perpetuate racism by another definition.
12. Elsewhere we show that reflexive antiracism is distinct from WRI. See Paradies et al. (forthcoming).
13. The term 'politically correct' was not explicitly defined but its implicit definition may have been: a statement that would be seen as racist according to the norms of anti-racism. While people may have individually differed about whether they agreed or disagreed with these norms, all were in full agreement about which statements were politically incorrect.
14. The distinction between 'critique' and 'criticism' as we use them in the course is further explained to participants.
15. Contrary to an essentialised view, racial identity is subject to change over time, with a significant number of survey respondents changing their racial identification when any survey is repeated (Kressin et al., 2003). On one occasion a course participant discussed their recent discovery of Indigenous ancestry, providing a discussion point relating to the sometimes fluid nature of Indigenous identification.

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